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THE ÆSTHETICS OF DRESS.

WE have assumed throughout that the end of Art was the cultivation and disciplining of the sense of beauty, and by this assumption we are willing to stand always. Whatever then is done with reference to this end becomes Art, it does not matter if it be painting a picture, arranging a group of vases in a parlor, or a coiffure on a lady's head. Whatever is done without reference to this end is a science, a manufacture—a mere occupation, whether it be in building a church, painting a portrait, or laying a pavement.

The world of Beauty is an universe, lying around us, and stretching *ad infinitum* on every side, but of which each man is for himself the centre, and of which, if he will but move either way, he finds the first stage of upward progression at his very feet, and if he be moved by fervent desire to enter into its enjoyment, his perceptions will go out in every direction, searching for, and finding, glory after glory, and gladness after gladness, time without end. Not to do this is to permit those perceptions to perish from disuse.

A grandiloquent opening for a chapter on dress! some one may say,—but, however little you may have dreamed of it, in dress is the commencement of artistic perception—it is the propylon of the temple. A man's self is always the nearest object to himself, and his own external appearance fosters, or blunts his sense of the beautiful, as it is in accordance with, or opposed to the laws of Beauty. We do not believe any exception can be found to this rule, though we are aware that some artists whose perception of the beautiful in Nature is very keen, do not make it of use in their dress; but this would only prove that a man may continually violate this sense, and not destroy it. To suppose that he would do so without injuring it, would be as just as to suppose that if he should continually commit moral transgression through thoughtlessness, he would not thereby blunt his moral sense.

Yet, we do not believe there is a man, artist or other, who has a capacity to perceive the beautiful, who would not, if left to himself, without the influence of custom, apply his taste to his dress as effectually as he would any other way, and if he wears a

garment which is unbecoming, it is from deference to fashion, or a prejudice arising from the long use of that which is ugly,—and under either supposition he wrongs himself, and deforms, in some degree, his better nature. We are confident we do not over-estimate the importance of the ÆSTHETICS OF DRESS, when we assert a belief that an age which does not study them, can never attain the same perfection of the Beautiful in Art, as if it should regard the laws of beauty in its apparel. It was in this that the middle ages showed the effects of artistic training more widely than in any other way, and the common costume of those ages is now our model for picturesqueness and grace.

But the question does not need argument, for we are confident that all men will admit it in the abstract, if they can understand it. Any one will feel, that though an occasional ugly thing will prick the æsthetic feeling, and render it more sensitive, the continual seeing it will, in time, cease to be offensive—and this *because in that direction the æsthetic feeling has lost its power*, or has been destroyed, and that that which was once a good has been embraced by our natures, and covered over like a scar in a tree, to quiet the perpetual pain it gave us. Think of this seriously, and understand that, as we permit the ugly to remain unquestioned before our eyes, we are gradually scarring and rendering callous the noblest emotional element in our composition.

If, then, there is a *Duty in Art*, there is also a duty in dress, viz.: to let it be fashioned according to the laws of the universe, which is beautiful in the little as well as in the great, in which the most perfect beauty accords ever with the most entire fitness for use. And this is a duty, not to the artist alone, but to every man, whether he recognizes its weight or not. He may violate it, but he *must pay the penalty*. We are aware that obedience to the law, in this respect, would necessitate an immense revolution in the world of mere exteriors, and, for a time, perhaps, the anarchy which ever accompanies revolutions; but through this anarchy—this Babel of garbs, lies the path to the highest beauty. First, set men free to choose, and finally they will choose rightly; but confine their choice,

and they are sure to be wrong. Through *entire free will* only comes *perfect purity*. Men of thought recognize this in morals, in politics; and believe us there is one law for them and Art. We are aware, too, that we are demanding of you, grave counsellors, you, solid merchants, that which you regard as a levity, that you should, in the midst of cares material, still think perpetually of the little things of Beauty. But tell us, when you became statesmen, or merchants, did you forget that as men you are created by a law of Beauty, which law you must be developed by, in the least of things as well as in the greatest? And when you went into business did you make it your all in all, and throw away all of the poetic and artistic in your natures? Can business and art not move in the same sphere? Can the one never be made to modify the coldness and repulsiveness of the other? Must the actual of Life be set on one side, and its flowers and idealities on the other? It may be so where business is the end of life, and the accumulation of money the *ne plus ultra* of existence; and to the men who live in this frigid zone of Being we have nothing to say; our sun can never warm their frozen souls into joy and peace—they have chosen the ice—let them not regret the summer. We wish men would think more of the importance of these trifles, remembering that to violate taste is as certainly a sin as to violate conscience, though not perhaps of the same order—that to wear an ugly garment, is to clothe one's self with sin.

There is no more ungraceful *form* in existence, as applied to dress, than the stiff, cylindrical thing we wear on our heads (not *we* editorially, because we don't wear them), and what use is there in attempting to educate the sense of beauty in a people, when we have before our eyes and over our eyes, the least beautiful things the perverted ingenuity of men could contrive. Of what use it is to go out into the country a few weeks each summer, to awaken the perceptions of the beautiful, and then, rushing back to the city, for the rest of the year do all we can to deaden them, by surrounding ourselves with deformity and ugliness.

We shall have another chapter on this subject to read ere long, and shall then endeavor to develop the laws that ought to

govern dress—the principles of the beautiful in their application even to hats and coats, to bonnets and dresses.

Letters

ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING.

LETTER III.

If a truly fine picture could be produced with the same certainty as an ordinary steam-engine, specific directions might be given with a uniform result; and it would appear that thousands of landscapes *are* produced on precisely similar grounds, with even fewer claims to attributes of Fine Art. Although there are certain principles which constantly guide the hand of the true artist, which can be defined, classified, and clearly understood, and, therefore, communicable—yet the whole history of Art from the beginning, does not present a single instance where a thorough and scientific knowledge of these principles has of itself been able to produce a truly great artist, for the simple reason that such knowledge never can create the feeling, which overrules all principles, and gives the impress of true greatness.

I caution you, therefore, against reliance on any theoretical or technical directions which I or any one else may give in the course of your studies, further than as means which you are to employ subject to your own feeling. It has not been my intention in these letters to show you *how* to paint so much as *what* to paint: to point out the distant object, and erect an occasional guide-board on what seems to me the best path leading to it. The means and modes of travel are already to be had at every road-side, and better than I can furnish. All that I might say on the various colors and mediums, tools, or what not, necessary for your purpose, including dissertations on design, composition, effect, color and execution, would only be a repetition of what has been already written and published throughout the land, and which you can readily procure of the color-man and the bookseller. After all, whatever valuable instructions *they* furnish, their practical value must depend on your experience. All that I would advise is this—let materials be few and simple at first; as you advance, you will add what your feeling calls for. Much useful information may be obtained on all the subjects above mentioned, and you may be enlightened in the elements of *picturesqueness*, and other externals, with which alone too many artists, critics and connoisseurs, are contented; but those who can appreciate the higher attributes which make a picture a noble work of Art, will tell you that all the above-named requisites may be very imperfectly employed, and yet the picture may be truly fine, and even great; they will tell you that the difference consists in that which distinguishes the versifier from the poet, and this is all it is essential to know.

That is a fine picture which at once takes possession of you—draws you into it—you traverse it—breathe its atmosphere—feel its sunshine, and you repose in its shade without thinking of its design or execution, effect or color. These are after considerations: there is poetry in such a landscape, however humble. It will be great in pro-

portion as it declares the glory of God, by a representation of his works, and not of the works of man.

I appeal with due respect from the judgment of those who have yielded their noblest energies to the fascinations of the *picturesque*, giving preference to scenes in which man supplants his Creator, whether in the gorgeous city of domes and palaces, or in the mouldering ruins that testify of his "ever fading glory," beautiful indeed, and not without their moral, but do they not belong more to the service of the tourist and historian than to that of the *true* landscape artist?

Without further multiplying words, you will perceive the purport of these observations. There can be no dissent from the maxim, that a knowledge of integral parts is essential for the construction of a whole—that the alphabet must be understood before learning to spell, and the meaning of words before being able to read—not to admit this would be absurd; yet many a young artist goes to work in the face of an equal absurdity—filling a canvas just as an idle boy might fill a sheet of paper with unmeaning scrawls, occasionally hitting the form of a letter, and, perhaps, even a word, so that the whole mass, at a little distance, may have the semblance of writing; and so, after he has wasted sufficient materials to have served, by well-directed study, to effect the attainment of the knowledge he lacks, he feels this deficiency, and goes back, or more correctly speaking, takes the first step forward, and begins with his letters. You have learned these letters, and how to spell, in the practice of drawing, and you have found out the meaning of many words, but there are yet many more, with phrases and whole sentences to learn (and this, I myself, feel, in more than one sense, while writing to you), before you can write and entirely express your thoughts.

Proceed then, choosing the more simple foreground objects—a fragment of rock, or trunk of a tree; choose them when distinctly marked by strong light and shade, and thereby more readily comprehended; do not first attempt foliage or banks of mingled earth and grass; they are more difficult of imitation, which, as far as practicable, should be your purpose. Paint and repaint until you are *sure* the work *represents* the model—not that it merely resembles it. This purpose, that is, the study of foreground objects, is worthy whole years of labor; the process will improve your judgment, and develop your skill—and perception, thought, and ingenuity will be in constant exercise. Thus you will not merely have observed in the rock, the lines, angles, and texture, and in the tree trunk, the scoring or plainness of surface, which respectively characterizes them, but you will have acquired knowledge and skill applicable alike to every portion of the picture. In producing such an imitation, you will have learned to represent shape with solidity, projection, depression, and relief, nearness and distance, the coöperation of color with form, light and shade, and above all, you will have developed and strengthened your perception of the natural causes of all these results.

In the tree trunk, for example, and also in the rock—though less simple, and not as

suitable for the present illustration—you see the application of perspective, and a demonstration of the law which governs the expression of space. When the light strikes on the trunk of an oak, on the side directly at right angles with your vision, the scoring lines nearest the eye and towards the shadowed sides, are strongest and sharpest, graduating in distinctness from the centre outward, and each division of bark diminishes proportionately. Light and color conform to these changes, being most pure or positive in the nearest portions. The lesson on the shape or roundness of this object is not the only one; you have the principle of that gradation in light and dark, and color, which begins at the foreground, and extends to the horizon. Thus every *truthful* study of near and simple objects will qualify you for the more difficult and complex; it is only thus you can learn to read the great book of Nature, to comprehend it, and eventually transcribe from its pages, and attach to the transcript your own commentaries.

There is the letter and the spirit in the true Scripture of Art, the former being tributary to the latter, but never overruling it. All the technicalities above named are but the language and the rhetoric which expresses and enforces the doctrine—not to be unworthily employed to embellish falsehood, or ascribe meaning to vacuity. As I have not proposed to teach you processes, neither have I aimed at methodical arrangement or direction, further than so much as appears indispensable to a right beginning, I desire you to pursue the road pointed out with all consistent freedom from restraint, adding only such restrictive and experimental advice as shall incidentally appear to me advantageous to you.

If you should have a predilection for color, you will be most likely, in your early stage of practice, to give it undue importance, to an extent that may impede your progress—that is, sacrifice higher qualities to its fascination. I know no better safeguard to this liability, than to remind you that a fine engraving gives us all the greatest essentials of a fine picture, and often a higher suggestiveness than the original it represents, and so often, a mere outline, because the imagination fills in the rest, according to our own ideas of truth in its completeness. But, for the present I would especially direct attention to the light and dark, which make up the effect of the engraving, being far more complete than the outline; in short, it lacks nothing but color, which, though mighty in its power, is nothing more than the eloquence of Nature employed for the fullest enforcement of her Truth—the great ideas are antecedent. Waste not your time, therefore, on *broad sketches* in color; such only can be useful to the mature artist, as suggestive rather than representative. You had better look at all objects more with reference to light and dark than color, but do not infer from this that I would depreciate the value of color, for it is of inestimable value. It is, however, a sort of humorous sprite or good demon—often whimsical and difficult of control—at times exceedingly mischievous, spoiling many a good picture as if with mere malicious intent—but when experience shall have acquainted you with its tricks and its virtues, you will understand better the worth of its service. Study, then,